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Perkins's Tractors

These metallic tractors gave rise to a medical delusion which prevailed in this country and Europe about a hundred years ago. They were used for the relief of pain and disease by Dr. Elisha Perkins (1745-1799), an eminent physician for a long time President of the Connecticut Medical Society. They were hammered out of iron and brass, flat on one side and half round on the other, and came in pairs, "the white" and "the yellow." The accompanying photo-engraving shows very nearly their actual size. It was reported that many cures were effected by drawing them over the affected part, and the inventor believed that he had made an important medical discovery. After his death the treatment was widely advertised, and the tractors were sold in large numbers, the price in London in 1802 being five guineas. They gave rise to the poem, "Terrible Tractoration," and also to a number of books discussing at great length the merits of the new treatment. In 1884 four of them were found in the house of Dr. Judson's grandfather at Plymouth, Massachusetts, where he was a minister early in the last century. They had lain undisturbed for many years in a cupboard and were tied up with old-fashioned hat pins and hair pins. Dr. Judson kept them several years without knowing their significance till he happened to see a pair framed and carefully preserved in the library of the New York Academy of Medicine. It seems desirable to print a picture of these curios, as doubtless specimens are to be found in cupboards and bureau drawers of old houses in this country and England. It is said that those first made were stamped with numbers, and that letters patent to Dr. Perkins, signed by President Washington, are held by descendants of the inventor residing at Springfield, Massachusetts.

Perkins's Tractors.

The tractors found at Plymouth were given to the libraries of R.I.Med.Soc.and U.S.Naval Med School at Washington,D.C.
A.P.Judson,New Yrrk,N.Y.

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